

JULY

PROSPECT,

OR

View of the Moral World,

BY ELIHU PALMER.

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Comments upon the sacred writings of the Jews and Christians: Genesis, chapter 28th.

THE MIRACULOUS LADDER.

IF all the stories and dreams contained in the Bible were taken out of it, there would not be much matter remaining of any kind whatever. Jacob, probably in one of his courting excursions, for it was about this time that he and his brother Esau, were ranging up and down through the country, in quest of female companions, laid himself down by the way side upon a pillow of stones, and there perchance, hard as the pillow was, he fell asleep. Here it was that he saw an ideal vision, the longest ladder that ever was made. One end rested upon the earth, and the other end reached unto heaven. The description in the Book is as follows—and he dreamed, and, behold, a ladder set upon the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it. Perhaps this is the same ladder that the Babel builders made use of when they built their wonderful Tower, and the angels that ascended and descended might have been no other than the brick and mortar men, employed upon that wonderful fabric. This ladder if it reached to the nearest point of the heavens, that is to the moon, must have been two hundred and forty thousand miles long; wonderful ladder indeed! and he who dreamt about it, must surely have been inspired. If we reflect but a single moment upon the contemptible idea of associating the character of God with such dreams and dreamers, we should be ready to conclude that the most obstinate fanaticism, the most prejudiced superstition would blush for such impudent tenacity. What has a dreaming old man and a

long ladder to do with a divine and immaculate system of religion? Nothing at all, and the idle stories contained in the Bible are of themselves sufficient to work its destruction in the estimation of all reasonable and reflecting minds. When Jacob had aroused from his ladder building slumbers, he still seemed to be in a kind of a trance—he fancied that he was in the house of God and at the very gates of heaven; for he says this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. The imagination of man when set on fire by religious enthusiasm, conjectures every thing, believes every thing, and abandons in a thousand instances, the cause of reason and truth. Toward the close of this chapter, we find Jacob entering into a conditional stipulation with Jehovah, that if he would find him with bread and other necessaries he should be his God, implying at the same time, that if he noticed any deficiencies he would have little or nothing to do with him. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, if God will be with me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God. According to this Bible there is a great deal of bargain and sale business going on between terrestrial beings and the Jewish divinity. Our readers have not yet forgotten the bantering manner in which Abraham reduced the claims of Jehovah in the case of Sodom. All these things show what low and imperfect conceptions the writers of the old testament must have entertained of the supreme creator of the world. This single circumstance proves beyond all controversy that this is not a book of inspiration; for if God had inspired man at all, he would have infused into his mind more correct and exalted notions of his immortal attributes, and the divine plenitude of his character.

TRUTHS are not controverted with passion and malignity, if not enjoined as articles of belief. In the demonstrative sciences, truths not universally understood are not received, and never enjoined, though immediately tending to public advantage. It would be thus in religious inquiries, if religion were left by men as it is left by God.—You will easily imagine, I do not mean by the word God any of those immoral, mischievous, malignant phantoms the patrons of particular nations, whether Jews or Gentiles—I do not mean any of the divinities, with whom the most exceptionable of your ancestors have

affected particular intimacies—I do not mean any of the beings who may be called upon by venal and unprincipled priests, to throw the varied veils of contradictory superstitions over the infernal intrigues which may tinge the earth with human blood from the shores of the Danube to Nootka-Sound—I mean the God of *all* nature, of *all* mankind—of whose existence no mind can doubt, without being involved in inextricable absurdities—but

*"In search of whom, o'erstretch'd idea bursts
And thought rolls back on darkness."* —

The power, wisdom, and goodness of this ineffable Being have been associated with the most pernicious vices, in the characters of an indefinite number of gods; the fear and worship of which have been deemed necessary auxiliaries to various forms of political government. The superstition being involved in the constitution, sometimes its instrument, sometimes its *director*, it was sheltered from the approaches of reason or inquiry by the supposed expediency of supporting that constitution.—Among the successful impostures of this kind, the Roman Catholic superstition is remarkable; it approached the civil government in the garb of lowly meekness and disinterested humility; it sought toleration, then protection, then dominion: it nearly obtained the wish of Caligula; for mankind seemed to have one neck, on which it set its foot.

In any institution, as in any private mind, the spirit of intolerance and persecution is in proportion to its opposition to reason and the enormity of its absurdities. The cruelties of the church of Rome, have, therefore, been so horrible, that they will leave on the character of human nature a stain which no time or virtue can efface.

When the oppressions of this pernicious despotism became intolerable, some ameliorations took place, under pretences of reformation, on the general principle, *that in order to preserve the profits and advantages of ecclesiastical imposture, some of its most enormous and shameful abuses should be relinquished.*

Hence the moderation and prudence of those ecclesiastical policies denominated reformed; and those qualities are to be found among sectaries in a graduated state, as their power is diminished, or they are forced by reciprocal contentions towards the confines of reason. But in all Christian sects, the principle of persecution is to be discerned, under some pretence of

disguise, and in a dormant or active state; and it will ever remain, while a single privileged imposter, whether he be called a Pope, a Bishop, a Dissenting Clergyman, or a Methodist Exhorter, can find his advantage in annexing or affecting to annex merit or demerit to the belief of any propositions.

In the institution of the Church of England, the English reformers could not agree on *all* the Popish abuses to be relinquished, and the Puritan faction arose, which has continued to this time, under various forms, the faithful repository of interested discontent, and virulent zeal for favourite opinions.

Lessons to a young Prince, by Williams.

A letter of Rousseau to his Bookseller at the Hague.

SIR,

I AM very sorry for that embarrassment which you tell me you lie under, on account of the Savoyard's Creed, inserted in my *Emilius*; but I declare to you again, once for all, that no threats, no violence, shall ever prevail on me to suppress a syllable of what I have written. As you did not think it necessary to consult me with regard to the contents of my manuscript, when you treated for the copy, you have no right to make application to me now, on account of the obstacles you may meet with to its publication: especially as the bold truths scattered up and down in my other works, might very naturally suggest to you, that this was by no means exempt from the like. I am astonished you should ever conceive that a man, who takes so many precautions that his works may not be altered after his decease, would permit them to be mutilated during his life time.

With respect to the several reasons you have urged, you might have spared yourself that trouble, by supposing that I had myself reflected on what was proper to be done. You tell me that I am censured by people of my own way of thinking. But this cannot possibly be; for I who certainly am of my own way of thinking, approve what I have done; nor is there any action of my whole life with which my heart is more perfectly satisfied. In ascribing glory to God, and endeavouring to promote the good of mankind, I have done my duty; whether they profit by it or not. I would not give a straw to con-

vert their censure to applauses. As for the rest, to take things in the worst light, what can the world do to me more than the infirmities of my nature will very speedily do of themselves? The public can neither confer nor deprive me of my reward; this depends not on any human power. You see therefore, that my measures are taken let what will happen; for which reason, I would advise you to press me no farther on the subject; as every thing you can possibly advance will be absolutely to no purpose.

Yours, &c.

J. J. ROUSSEAU.

Lately died in Lithuania, a man aged 163 years. This modern Mathuselah, at 89, married a second wife in the 15th year of her age. He had been a soldier, had been wounded, but never had been sick. A monument has been raised on his grave. He was 11 years older than old Parr, who died in England in 1634, aged 152, and who lived in ten reigns.

DOES it consist with the goodness or wisdom of God to deliver himself in such mysterious terms, that the wisest and most learned men, with all their labour, can never be certain when they come at the meaning, and most own that they cannot agree, because their understandings are confounded in the darkness of it; and where there is not sufficient light to convince reasonable men, their understandings are unenlightened. In obscure prophecies men may everlastingly puzzle themselves and others, without any certainty of ever being in the right. This is the case of all those prophecies which Mr. Jackson has given himself so much labour about, ferched from Daniel and the Revelations. If Prophecies are not commonly understood, or not understood by common readers, they were not designed for common good. If those of the Faculty only understand them, they are then only learned prescriptions to keep up the craft and dignity of the Faculty. If we know not certainly what a Prophecy signifies, of what signification is it? Common sense is sufficient for common honesty, which is plain and open, and delights to shew itself clear and fair.

By what means can we be sure of the certain times when the particular Prophecies were written? and that we have their uncorrupted writings? For it is well known that corruptions have

crept into the Text, and that it was the work of Ezra and others, after the Jews Captivity, to find out and correct them, as well as they could. If the word of God has been corrupted, there can be little Dependance on the word of man, or on his wisdom or honesty to make it pure; for there are certain degrees of prejudice, partiality, interest and ignorance, that man cannot surmount. The facts predicted should have been known to be fulfilled by those that knew the Prophets and their prophecies; unless there can be demonstrative proof, that the traditional Prophecy could not possibly be corrupted. Oral tradition cannot be trusted to in the second or third Generation, scarce from a second or third Person; The natural infirmities of men generally corrupt it without Intention. It is rare, that two or three persons tell so much as the sense of the particulars of a story exactly one after another.

A Prophecy, when delivered, should be such as no human reason could foresee, nor could possibly be any random Guess; then the original or true copy of it should be well witnessed, and preserved by men that had no interest in deceiving the world; if possible, in such manner there could be no possibility of corrupting or altering it. It should also be so clear and intelligible, as to admit of no misunderstanding it. The circumstances that come after to pass, should so agree with the plain Prophecy, that it may be as well known to be the fulfilling thereof, as a man may know his own face in a glass; or, deception may creep in; the very possibility of which therefore should be absolutely guarded against. The better the chain holds together, the stronger it is, extraordinary cases must have extraordinary proofs; and alter all, when the things predicted is past, the credit of its prediction naturally lessens, as time increases; because it is well known, that the world is full of impositions; And in the things of God, there ought not to be the least shadow of it.

Though it is endeavoured to be proved, that some of the Prophecies were literally fulfilled; yet if all were not, if some prove false, it is a proof the Prophets were not under the influence of an infallible Spirit, or not infallibly guided by it; and be the case either way, we cannot trust to them in all cases; and if not in all we cannot in any, unless we can distinguish those cases. If the Prophecies contain some good and true things in them, can those recommend them that are not so?

It was observed, that there is the greatest difficulties in applying Prophecies, which are not clear and explicit to their in-

tended purpose ; or in knowing to what intent or purpose they were given : for instance ; what Prophecies some apply to the Redemption of the People of God by Jesus Christ, others have thought are only applicable to the Redemption of the Jews from the power of the king of Assyria, and had respect to the times they were written in. And though some of the Prophecies are said to be in part only accomplished ; in either case the parts are a great way asunder.

If the Prophets did not prophesy false things, they were sometimes misunderstood, and in the greatest essentials. The Jews expected their Saviour to be a temporal king, so did the primitive christians, before and after the Crucifixion of Jesus ; for the Millenarian Doctrine of his coming again to reign on the earth, is spoken of in several places of the New Testament which was to have been immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem ; and though the day and hour was not fixed, it was to be before that generation passed away, the Disciples were bid to expect it, watch for it, and be ready, not for the Holy Ghost, his substitute ; but for Jesus himself, and the manner of his coming was described ; therefore those were called the last days and times. And though we are told the Gospel was first to be preached to all nations, we are also told, that so it had then been in the Apostles time. And Christ's temporal reign on earth, was the opinion of the first Fathers of the church, viz. Cerinthus, in the first century, Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, had it from the christians by oral tradition. It was also embraced by Justin, Martyr, Irenæus, Tertullian, Hippolitus, Lactantius, Theophilus of Antioch, Methodus, Victorinus, and the most illustrious of the ancient Fathers, were Advocates for the Millennium. It was impossible to persuade the Jews or Jew Christians to the contrary. They expected Christ according to the Prophets, to sit on the throne or kingdom of David, which was a temporal kingdom, and from Jerusalem he was to administer judgment to all nations. The wise men that came to seek Jesus understood it so ; so did the angel Gabriel. Yet we are now told they were all mistaken, and that his kingdom was spiritual ; for tho' it was expected to be worldly, we are now sure his kingdom is not of this world, unless the established christian churches are a part of the world, having wordly power and grandeur, where his deputies generally rule, as if they never expected king Jesus would come and call them to account.

Believers of Prophecies being puzzled to explain them, when the letter of the Prophecy was not parallel to the letter

of the story they applied it, have understood, what was wanting to be made out, in an allegorical, figurative or mystical manner; so they have made a mysterious application to the letter of the prophecy, or some one mystical prophecy to many very different cases: or the mystery of one, to the mystery of the other; and by the spiritual wire-drawing of one or all these methods, they always may make out what they please. If by any of these means the expositor by chance or hard labour draws a tolerable good parallel, the prophet gets sure praise; but if he fails, which is oftener the case, the expositor gets sure disgrace. So difficult has the exposition generally been, not only to common understandings but to learned men, that happy is he who has gone into the battle, and come off without a scar in his intellects, or being crippled in his understanding; and some have been affected with a kind of prophetic delirium all their life-time after.

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